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### ORIGINAL

#### Before the **Federal Communications Commission** Washington, D.C. 20056

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FEDERAL COMMUNICATIONS COMMISSION

In the Matter of	)	OFFICE OF THE SECRETARY
	)	
Implementation of the	)	CC Docket No. 96-128
Pay Telephone Reclassification and	)	
Compensation Provisions of the	)	
Telecommunications Act of 1996	)	
	)	
AirTouch Paging Petition for Waiver	)	
of Payphone Compensation Obligations	)	

To: The Commission

#### REPLY TO OPPOSITION TO APPLICATION FOR REVIEW

AirTouch Paging ("AirTouch"), by its attorneys and pursuant to Section 1.115 of the Commission's Rules, hereby replies to the RBOC/GTE/SNET Payphone Coalition's Opposition to AirTouch's Application for Review<sup>1</sup> of the Memorandum Opinion and Order issued by the Chief, Common Carrier Bureau (the "Bureau") in the above-captioned proceeding.<sup>2</sup> The following is respectfully shown:

The Opposition of the RBOC/GTE/SNET Payphone Coalition (the "Coalition Opposition") fails to address the fundamental arguments raised by AirTouch's

Application for Review of AirTouch Paging, CC Docket No. 96-128, filed April 1/ 8, 1998.

Implementation of the Pay Telephone Reclassification and Compensation Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, DA 98-181, released March 9, 1998 (the "Bureau Order"). No. of Copies rec'd 01 List ABCDE

Application for Review and its underlying request for waiver. Rather, the Coalition makes a series of erroneous (and largely irrelevant) assertions in an attempt to obfuscate the issues. In this Reply, AirTouch will respond only to the most significant errors in the Coalition's Opposition.

## I. The Coalition Fails to Distinguish Between the Commission's Interim (Per-Phone) and Permanent (Per-Call) Compensation Systems

In its Opposition, the Coalition claims that "two facts" are sufficient to "prove ... that the Commission has always concluded that PSPs are entitled to compensation without regard to the availability of payphone-specific digits." Coalition Opposition at p. 8. First, according to the Coalition, in the *First Payphone Order*<sup>2/</sup> the Commission established an interim compensation system which did not have as a component the provision of payphone-specific coding digits by PSPs. The Coalition draws the erroneous conclusion that "the Commission [therefore] could not have believed that the availability of coding digits ... [was] a prerequisite to the IXCs' obligation to pay fair compensation." *Id*.

This argument simply misses the mark. The availability of payphone-specific coding digits was established as a prerequisite to PSPs' right to receive compensation <u>not</u> on a per-payphone basis, which was the system established for the interim period, but on a <u>per-call</u> basis, which was the system established to be

Implementation of the Pay Telephone Reclassification and Compensation Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, CC Docket No. 96-128, Report and Order, 11 FCC Rcd 20,541 (1996) ("First Payphone Order").

implemented on a permanent basis after the expiration of the interim period. While it is true that during the interim per telephone compensation period PSPs were not required to transmit coding digits, this does not lead to a conclusion that such a requirement does not exist for per-call compensation.

Moreover, the Coalition overlooks the fact that the Commission expressly stated that the availability of coding digits was a prerequisite to the obligation to pay compensation on a <u>per-call</u> basis. <sup>5</sup>/ But for the fact that the Commission had imposed this condition, the Coalition would not have requested, just one week before its obligation to provisions coding digits was to become effective, a waiver of the condition so that its members could receive compensation. AirTouch's waiver request was predicated on its need for comparable relief in light of the LECs' and PSPs' continued inability to provide coding digits while still demanding per-call compensation. Thus, the interim compensation plan simply is irrelevant to AirTouch's waiver request.

In any event, the Coalition fails to acknowledge that the interim compensation system was held to be arbitrary and capricious by the Court of Appeals,

Implementation of the Pay Telephone Reclassification and Compensation Provisions of the Telecommunications Act of 1996, CC Docket No. 96-128, Order on Reconsideration, 11 FCC Rcd. 21,233, 21,265-66 (1996) ("Reconsideration Order") ("[o]nce per-call compensation becomes effective, ... to be eligible for such compensation, payphones will be required to transmit specific payphone coding digits as a part of their ANI....").

<sup>5/</sup> Reconsideration Order, 11 FCC Rcd. at 21,265-66.

because neither the rate itself nor the decision about who must pay the rate (a decision which did not then affect AirTouch) were supportable.

### II. Call Blocking Is a Necessary Component of the Commission's Per-Call Compensation System

The second "fact" cited by the Coalition in support of its claim that PSPs are entitled to compensation without regard to the availability of payphone-specific digits is not a fact at all, but rather is the Coalition's own interpretation of an argument made by the Commission before the Court of Appeals in its attempt to defend the payphone compensation decisions. The Coalition attempts to link two unrelated assertions: one—already shown to be erroneous—that the obligation to provision coding digits is not a sine qua non of the right to receive pay per-call compensation, Opposition at p. 8,½ and, two, that if the per-call compensation rate established by the Commission is "fair," then the transmission of coding digits (and hence the ability to block calls) is irrelevant.

<sup>6/</sup> Illinois Public Telecommunications Assn. v. FCC, 117 F.3d 555, 564-65, clarified on rehearing, 123 F.3d 693 (D.C. Cir. 1997).

The Coalition asserts that "the Commission rejected the claim that the payphone-specific-digit requirement was a sine qua non of the obligation to pay compensation."

Opposition at p. 8. In fact, the opposite is true: the Commission stated that "[o]nce percall compensation becomes effective, ... to be eligible for such compensation, payphones will be required to transmit specific payphone coding digits as a part of their ANI...."

Reconsideration Order, 11 FCC Rcd. at 21,265-66 (emphasis added). The Coalition's members consistently have acted with the understanding that they must provide coding digits as a condition to their right to receive compensation. In fact, this understanding formed the basis of their own waiver request. The Bureau had the same understanding, as evidenced by its grant of a blanket waiver to the Coalition and others.

Opposition at pp. 8-9.\(^{\geq}\) The Coalition recites the Commission's assertions to the Court that "per call compensation [should be allowed] to go forward despite a limited waiver of the requirement that certain payphones transmit payphone-specific digits ...\(^{\geq}\) [b]ecause the default per call compensation rate fairly compensates PSPs for calls actually made on their payphones." Opposition at 8-9 (quoting Brief for the Federal Communications Commission, MCI Telecomm. Corp. v. FCC, No. 97- 1675 (D.C.Cir. Feb. 27, 1998), at p. 43).

The Coalition's support for the Commission's argument to the Court that coding digits are not required if the Commission has deemed the per-call rate to be "fair" is misplaced. The Court already has stated that call blocking may be used to avoid whatever "default rate" the Commission has established. When it rejected the interim compensation system in 1997, the Court stated:

The Coalition's readiness to cite as "fact" what is merely a legal fiction raises significant questions about the Coalition's entire opposition. The Opposition is replete with additional evidence of the Coalition's approach. For example, at p. 11, the Coalition states: "AirTouch and ITA alike ask the Commission to decide that the Bureau's coding digit waivers 'directly undermine Commission policy.' ITA Application [for Review] at 8; see AirTouch Application [for Review] at 17-19." Notwithstanding the Coalition's "see" reference, AirTouch made no such claim, implicitly or expressly. In fact, the portions of AirTouch's Application for Review cited by the Coalition nowhere refer to the waivers granted by the Bureau to the LECs and PSPs. The purpose of the Application for Review was to explain why the Bureau's failure to also grant a waiver to AirTouch was arbitrary and contrary to law.

<sup>2/</sup> A portion of the Commission's statement deleted by the Coalition and represented by the ellipsis states "that would facilitate call blocking". Thus, the Commission has conceded a nexus between the transmission of coding digits by the LECs and PSPs, and the ability to block unwanted calls.

[T]he \$.35 rate ... cannot stand. The FCC must now set a new interim rate and decide what is to happen once the interim period is over. The agency may of course elect to use the new interim rate as a 'default rate' at the conclusion of the interim period. If this were done, the PSPs and IXCs could still be left free to depart from the default rate through negotiations (with IXCs having to resort to blocking to gain leverage in any such negotiations).<sup>10</sup>/

The Court's reasoning is sound, and is consistent with the Court's reliance on the Commission's assurances about the availability of call blocking. The Commission's compensation system is based on negotiations between interested parties to determine the appropriate rate at which PSPs will be compensated for completed calls placed from their payphones. The requirement to pay the "default" per-call rate applies only when there is no agreement about rates. Negotiations are permitted at any time, regardless of what the "default" rate is. The Court understood that call blocking is necessary to gain leverage with a PSP that otherwise would be free to force payment obligations on a buyer who seeks to avoid even the "default" rate — regardless of whether the Commission has deemed that rate to be "fair" under Section 276 of the Communications Act.

<sup>10/</sup> IPTA, 117 F.3d at 565.

<sup>11/</sup> See, e.g., id. at 567.

<sup>12/</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1300(a).

<sup>13/</sup> See 47 C.F.R. § 64.1300(c), (d).

### III. The Coalition Has Failed to Show that the Bureau Has a Rational Waiver Policy

In its Application for Review, AirTouch demonstrated that the *Bureau Order* denying AirTouch's waiver request was not based on a rational waiver policy. AirTouch showed that the Bureau failed to address the changed circumstances that support the waiver, failed to consider the harm to AirTouch, and made other decisional errors, resulting in an arbitrary and capricious decision to deny the waiver request. See Application for Review at pp. 11-19.

In its Opposition, the Coalition erroneously asserts that the Bureau "discussed and refuted AirTouch's arguments in exhaustive detail.... There is simply no argument that the Bureau did not air and refute." Opposition at p. 14 (citing Bureau Order, paras. 83-98). Notably, the Coalition did not address any of the specific examples AirTouch provided in its Application for Review. Instead, like the Bureau Order, the Coalition has substituted conclusory statements for reasoned analysis. This approach is at

<sup>14/</sup> For example, in its Application for Review, AirTouch showed that the Bureau had conceded that AirTouch would be harmed by denial of a waiver, but had failed to explain why that harm did not warrant relief comparable to that granted to LECs and PSPs. The Coalition does not oppose these showings. Instead, the Coalition takes issue with AirTouch's original showing of harm made in support of the waiver request. Opposition at 13. To the extent the Bureau already has conceded the full extent of the harm to AirTouch, the Coalition's arguments are not appropriately before the Commission because the Coalition did not timely challenge the *Bureau Order*.

odds with the Commission's obligation to give a waiver request a "hard look" and not to treat it in a perfunctory manner. 15/

Recent events confirm that the Bureau has not articulated a rational waiver policy. Just three weeks after denying AirTouch a waiver, the Bureau issued an order waiving per-call payment obligations with respect to those payphones that do not transmit payphone-specific coding digits. Significantly, the stated basis for the IXC Waiver Order is not substantially different from circumstances that AirTouch cited in support of its own waiver request. In light of this most recent development, the Commission now must explain how the denial of AirTouch's request is part of a rational waiver policy, and, in particular, why the Commission believes it is "fair" to compensate PSPs for calls that AirTouch (as it explained in its waiver request) seeks to avoid by implementing call blocking.

<sup>15/</sup> WAIT Radio v. FCC, 418 F.2d 1153, 1157 (D.C. Cir. 1969).

<sup>16/</sup> CC Docket No. 96-128, Memorandum Opinion and Order, DA 98-642 (Com. Car. Bur., rel. April 3, 1998) ("IXC Waiver Order").

<sup>17/</sup> See, e.g., IXC Waiver Order, para. 16 (citing "special circumstances ... when payphone-specific coding digits are not available, particularly in light of the waivers granted [to the LECs and PSPs] within the Bureau Waiver Order and the Bureau Coding Digit Waiver Order."

# WHEREFORE, the foregoing premises duly considered, AirTouch respectfully requests that the Commission grant AirTouch's Application for Review.

Respectfully submitted,

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